



Vic Legg – A Citation on the presentation of the Gold Badge of the English Folk Dance and Song Society

Vic Legg is a proper Cornish boy, born to a travelling family in 1941 in Launceston, where his granddad had settled. As Vic says, his horse was getting old and roads were being metalled, so he had a bungalow built on some land he already owned. Several other traveller families had already settled in Launceston.

The family had been on the road until 1936. His mother, Sophie, was born in 1918 and had not been inside a house until she was 16 years old. Sophie was the youngest of six children – Betsy, Charlotte, Jim, Fred and Eddie came before her. The family were travelling hawkers, and Vic remembers going to Bodmin Police Station with his granddad to renew his hawker's license.

Vic's dad was from South Cerney in Gloucestershire, the son of a millwright. Both father and son were mummers with South Cerney Village Mummers. Vic's dad had been a professional footballer then worked in the electricity supply industry, which is what took him to Cornwall. He met Sophie in The Bell Inn in Launceston and they were married in 1939.

Vic reckons that it was his dad's singing that led to him being accepted by the travellers. Uncle Eddie, Vic's uncle, played accordion and banjo in the same pub, The Bell. A year after the war, the family settled in Bodmin. Vic remembers his mum carrying £3,000 in cash in a suitcase to complete the purchase of seven houses.

Vic spent the whole of his school life at the same school in Bodmin. He got a lot of stick from other children because of his traveller origins, but his granddad had been a fairground prize fighter and taught his grandson to look after himself. After school he served his apprenticeship in Devonport and lodged in Plymouth. He lived in theatrical digs and slept on a camp bed in the sitting room.

He remembers there being a lot of singing at home in the family. Everyone used to listen to *As I Roved Out* on the radio on Sunday mornings.

During the last year of his apprenticeship he heard that Cyril Tawney was running folk clubs in Plymouth and Vic found that people were singing in the same style that he had grown up with. He was more into rock n roll and wasn't singing himself. Things changed in 1962 when he moved to a job back in Bodmin.

He used to go to the celebrated Folk Cottage and then, in 1968, started a folk club in Bodmin with his friend Lar Cann and other local singers. They wanted somewhere in Cornwall that concentrated

on traditional song. People like Charlie Bate, Bob Cann and the Bodmin Wassailers were made honorary members of the club.

Three years later, in 1971, Trigg Morris was set up, led by Vic with Steve Danby and drawing members from the folk club. A year later, Trigg went to dance in Ireland and met Willie Clancy in Miltown Malbay, just a few months before his death. Vic reckons that on the same trip he and Steve Danby did a morris jig and were almost taken hostage by the IRA! Despite that they were keen to take their music and dancing to other places and went on a memorable twinning trip to Brittany.

If he needed a reminder of the specialness of his family's singing, it came in the 1980's when Bill Leader sent Pete Coe to record songs from Sophie Legg and her sisters.

By the 1990's word had spread about Vic and his songs and he started to get invitations to sing at festivals and events across the country. He became a regular performer at festivals like Sidmouth, Dartmoor, Whitby, Warwick, Bromyard and Cornwall, which he helped move to Wadebridge from its original home in Falmouth. In 1996 he was booked for the first time to sing at Pinewoods in Massachusetts.

Vic's singing, dancing and good humoured garrulousness have brought immense pleasure to a great number of people but perhaps the thing that has brought the longest lasting pleasure to him has been his association with the Bodmin Wassail.

This is the country's oldest visiting wassail. It takes place almost in secret on 6th January every year and the earliest known reference to it is in 1624.

Vic first became aware of it during his school days. Roger Bate was his mate at school and Roger's father, Reg was a Wassailer. Vic was an errand boy for the International Stores when he first saw the Wassailers but it wasn't until the 1970's that he was invited to go out with them for the first time. Vic and Lar started at the same time and the regulars were Reg Bate, Desmond Jago, Tommy Green, Tommy Green Jnr and Charlie Wilson. Peter Marlow joined two years later. In those days the Wassailers only went out in the evenings, dressed in their customary hand me downs of top hat and tails and visiting local houses and pubs. Then, as now, the people of the town were exceptionally generous with their gifts of food, money and drink. The Wassailers were recorded by Peter Pilbeam for the BBC and the recordings can be heard on Topic's iconic Voice of the People series.

Vic started the Charlie Bate Memorial Award – an annual award to perpetuate the memory of a man who did so much for folk music in Cornwall. Vic himself was to become one of the recipients – presented to him by the great Bob Cann.

This Gold Badge seems the most fitting tribute to a man who is surely the embodiment of all that is good about folk song and dance in Cornwall – Vic Legg.

This citation was written by Eddie Upton, singer, musician, dancer, dance caller, Wassailer, former Director of Folk South West and himself a recipient of the Society's Gold Badge.

Vic Legg was presented with his EFDSS Gold Badge in August 2019 at Dartmoor Folk Festival.